



Letter from Taizé

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Indignation, Passivity or Commitment

In the course of the year, we are continuing to reflect in Taizé on the road "towards a new solidarity" launched in Berlin by Brother Alois. In recent months, a workshop has invited young people to reflect on the topic: "Indignation, passivity or commitment—the place of youth in today's society." In the same vein, in this issue young people evoke concrete commitments to others, in society and in their Christian communities. The inside pages offer a portrait of the prophet Elijah, a reflection on Jesus casting out the buyers and sellers from the Temple as an example of "the violence of a peacemaker," and an answer to the question: "Must a Christian always avoid violence?"

Walls exist not just between peoples and continents, but also close to us, and even within the human heart. Think of the prejudices between different nationalities. Think of the immigrants, so near and yet often so far away. (Brother Alois, *Letter 2012 – Towards a New Solidarity*)

Tom (Canada)

On one of my first days at Taizé, Brother Alois took a few minutes after evening prayer to highlight the plight of immigrants in Europe. As someone who had spent most of the prior two years working in shelters for refugee claimants in Toronto, Canada, I was touched to hear the prior of Taizé acknowledging the difficulties of people who leave all that is familiar to them to find a better life elsewhere.

It also quickly occurred to me that Brother Alois' message was an urgent one to hear for the pilgrims gathered in the Church of Reconciliation. It has become the political norm in many Western countries to vilify immigrants; prominent national leaders have recently made comments declaring the "failure" of multiculturalism, or bemoaning the presence of "too many foreigners".

My pilgrimage to Taizé inspired me to seek solidarity amongst newcomers with a renewed vigor. My prayer is that in 2012, the young people coming to Taizé will have the desire to encounter the other in their midst, and leave with an intention to live lives of tolerance and compassion.

Let us try and be attentive to the weakest, to those who find no work.

Jermer (Philippines)

My country is affected by many social injustices, and I have experienced this myself by the work I am now undertaking. In our community we have been working with some of the people within our reach who are victims of injustices, particularly the marginalized sector. There are still a lot of poor people and they need help in housing and education. Being part of a family who is somehow financially bless-

ed, I serve, through our community, to help our marginalized brothers and sisters by helping them out building their homes. Together with this, we conduct tutorial sessions to give them good study habits. I believe from the Gospel that I should go out and help our marginalized friends because as a Christian, I am asked to bring good news to the poor (Luke 4:18). Education is not only for those who have money, but it is for everyone. And I will share this conviction with my future sons and daughters.

Our attentiveness to the poorest can be expressed by getting involved in some form of social action.

Benjamin (Austria)

A few years ago, I moved from Austria to Romania to help former street children. Life in our social centre is never boring. We mostly take care of young adults, and it is always noisy. The day starts with a little prayer in our chapel, and it is very touching to hear how thankful people who have next to nothing can be. The intercessions take a long time, everybody wants to say something. Angelica always starts her prayer with "Dear God, thanks that you have awakened me to the light"...

Our educators work together with volunteers from Western Europe, but also

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Violence of a Peacemaker

Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. "It is written," he said to them, "'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it 'a den of robbers.'" The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant. "Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked him. "Yes," replied Jesus, "have you never read, 'From the lips of children and infants you, Lord, have called forth your praise'?" And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night. (Matthew 21:12-17)

At the end of Jesus' earthly existence, Matthew mentions two events in the Temple of Jerusalem, the center of Israel's religion. In them, Jesus implicitly criticizes a certain way of placing oneself before God and shows an alternative.

Some are shocked at the violence of Jesus in casting out the sellers, so dramatically different from the view of him as "gentle and humble of heart." Others find in it a justification for a "revolutionary Jesus." Both positions misunderstand what is going on. The verb "to drive or cast out" is normally used in the gospels to describe the exorcism of unclean spirits. In the wake of the prophets, Jesus makes a provocative symbolic statement. Neither violence against persons nor a literal attempt to destroy the sanctuary, his act expresses rejection of a system of worship too linked to human interests that distract people from what really matters.

What really does matter is shown in the second part of the text. The ill and the deformed were normally prohibited from entering the Temple (2 Samuel 5:8). Jesus welcomes and heals them. He thus reveals the image of a God who, far from separating the "impure" from the "pure," accepts everyone, starting with the outcasts. In this way the Temple finds its true calling, that of being "a house of prayer for all" (Mark 11:17). And other marginalized beings express the importance of what is happening: little children, who supposedly are unfamiliar with the Bible but who grasp the truth of Jesus by a kind of intuition.

Jesus thus becomes, by his acts, the locus of a new presence of God at the heart of the world. Saint John's version of the story (2:13-22) emphasizes this dimension, anticipating the destruction of the Temple by the Romans and the resurrection of Jesus, pole of a universal communion.

- Where have I seen love expressed by clear and powerful words and acts?
- How can we simplify the life of our communities to show what really matters? How can we make room for disregarded people, for listening to children?

Elijah (1 Kings 17-19)

What can we do with the violence that dwells in us? Can we transform it into positive energy? Or even more: can we change the image of a powerful God into a loving one? Elijah had to deal with these huge questions in order to discover his true vocation.

In the ninth century BCE, Israel was living a period of prosperity. But what kind? And for whom? The country was very much inclined to Baalism, a cult of fertility and rain. The question was how to bring together the God of the covenant, who had led the Israelites free from Egypt and made a community out of them, with a "commercial" cult like that of one of Baal.

Elijah appears without any presentation; he has no diploma or special call. (1 Kings 17:1). He declares himself the servant of the Lord. He begins with the logic of confrontation: who is stronger, God or Baal? Elijah or the king? In this same verse the prophet, in the life of the Lord, announces death!

While Elijah announces death, the Lord keeps on announcing life. God pushes him out of his logic of confrontation. At Kerith (the word means "break"), Elijah could discover a new face of God. God wants life, and nourishes the one who listens to him in spite of his attitude (v. 3-6).

After this "break," Elijah receives a new invitation from God. He is drawn even further, to the middle of Canaan where Baal is strongest, to Zarephath (v.9), which probably means "to purify or test".

The first step in the logic proposed by God was to trust in God's word. Now it is to trust in others, and, still more, to trust in the lowly, in a widow and an orphan. Elijah is invited to discover his real vocation: to welcome the word of God, to be welcomed by the poor and to announce and share that word with the lowly. We have here a dynamic of life, a dynamic of trust (v.10-17).

But a question arises: does Elijah, the man of God, bring death (v.18) or life (v. 23)? This question is solved by Elijah's prayer: faced with a clear injustice, he dares to pronounce a heartfelt request (v.21-22).

God of love, you call us to pray in the depths of our heart, using words or even without words. And in this way you make us passionate seekers of communion.

2 Jn 1:17-27

2SUN James writes: Humbly accept the word planted in you, which can give you life.

3 Lk 12:22-32

3Mon Jesus said to his disciples: Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the Kingdom.

4 Is 11:1-9

4Tue From the book of Isaiah: There shall be no more hurt or violence, for the land will be filled with the knowledge of God as the water covers the bottom of the sea.

5 1 Jn 3:1-3

5Wed We are already God's children. What we shall be in the future has not yet been revealed, but we know that we shall be like God because we shall see God as he really is.

6 Mt 5:44-48

6Thu Jesus said: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven. You must set no bounds to your love, just as your heavenly Father sets none to his.

7 Ac 26:1-23

7Fri Paul said: I have borne witness to great and small alike, saying that the Christ was to suffer and that, as the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim a light for all nations.

8 Mt 1:18-24

8Sat An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

9 Mk 7:31-37

9SUN Jesus took the man who was deaf and could hardly speak aside, away from the crowd. With a deep sigh, he said, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened!" At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he spoke clearly.

10 Mt 4:1-3

10Mon Days will come when many peoples will come and say, "Let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, so that he may teach us his ways." And they will hammer their swords into ploughshares and their spears into bill-hooks.

11 1 Tm 1:12-17

11Tue Paul writes: I am thankful to Christ Jesus, our Lord, who has strengthened me and judged me trustworthy, by calling me to his service.

12 Is 62:1-5

12Wed From the book of Isaiah: For the sake of my people, I shall not keep silent. I shall not rest until her justice shines out like the breaking of day.

13 Heb 13:1-8

13Thu Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have welcomed angels without knowing it.

14 1 Co 3:18-23

14Fri Paul writes: All things are yours; but you belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God.

15 1 P 4:7-11

15Sat Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ.

16 Mk 8:27-35

16SUN Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ."

17 Ps 69:30-37

17Mon You who seek God, may your hearts live! For God listens to the poor.

18 Jn 12:35-36

18Tue Jesus said to his disciples: Believe in the light so that you may become children of light.

19 1 P 3:8-17

19Wed Proclaim the Lord Christ holy in your hearts and always be ready to answer people who ask you the reason for the hope you have.

20 Mt 6:19-21

20Thu Jesus said: Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

21 Mt 9:9-13

21Fri St MATTHEW As he walked, Jesus saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office, and he said to him, "Follow me". And he got up and followed him.

22 2 Th 1:11-12

22Sat May God fulfill every good purpose of yours by his power and complete all that you have been doing by faith.

23 1 Th 5:12-22

23SUN Be always joyful, pray continually and give thanks in all circumstances.

24 Ps 27

24Mon "Come," my heart says, "seek God's face!" Your face, Lord, do I seek.

25 Ps 138

25Tue Lord, you look upon the humble. Though I live surrounded by trouble, you give me life.

26 Ac 20:17-38

26Wed Paul said: Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, who said, "There is more happiness in giving than in receiving."

27 Is 56:1-7

27Thu The Lord says: Let the stranger who has come to me not say, "For sure, the Lord will exclude me from his people." For I shall lead to my holy mountain all those who love God's name and become his servants; I shall give them joy.

28 1 P 3:8-12

28Fri Do not repay one wrong with another. Seek peace and pursue it.

29 Ep 3:14-21

29Sat May God strengthen you in your inner being through the Spirit, so that Christ may live in your hearts through faith.

SEPTEMBER

DAILY READINGS

30 Mk 9:38-48

30SUN Jesus said: If anyone gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ, then in truth I tell you, they will certainly not lose their reward.

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

7 ^{Mk 10:2-16}

SUN Jesus said: In truth I tell you, anyone who does not welcome the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.

8 ^{Is 44:1-5}

Mon The Lord says: Be not afraid, my servant, you whom I have chosen. For I shall pour out water on the thirsty land and streams on the dry ground; I shall pour out my Spirit upon you.

9 ^{Ep 6:18-20}

Tue Pray in the Spirit at all times. Never tire of praying for all God's people.

10 ^{Heb 13:17-25}

Wed May the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will.

11 ^{2 Co 1:3-7}

Thu Praised be God who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

12 ^{Mt 5:1-12}

Fri Jesus said: Happy are the clear in heart: they shall see God. Happy are the peacemakers: they shall be called children of God.

13 ^{Jn 17:6-11}

Sat Jesus prayed to his Father for his disciples, saying: I am no longer in the world; they are in the world and I am coming to you, Holy Father. Keep those you have given me true to your name, so that they may be one as we are one.

1 ^{Na 1:7-8}

Mon God is better than a fortress in time of distress; he recognises those who trust in him even when the flood rushes on.

2 ^{Jn 16:12-15}

Tue Jesus said: When the Spirit of truth comes, he will lead you to the complete truth, since he will not be speaking of his own accord but will say only what he has been told.

3 ^{Lk 4:42-44}

Wed Jesus said: I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God, because that is why I was sent.

4 ^{Lk 6:27-35}

Thu Jesus said: Treat others as you would like them to treat you.

5 ^{Rm 6:8-14}

Fri St. Paul writes: Give yourselves to God as people brought to life from the dead, and give every part of your bodies to God to be instruments of righteousness.

6 ^{Jm 1:5-8}

Sat James writes: God gives to all in simplicity, without reproach.

14 ^{Mk 10:17-30}

SUN Jesus said: Whoever leaves everything for my sake and for the sake of the Gospel will receive a hundred times as much in this present age, together with persecutions, and, in the age to come, eternal life.

15 ^{Ps 63}

Mon My soul is thirsting for you, my God, my body longs for you. Your love is better than life itself.

16 ^{Mt 7:7-8}

Tue I watch in hope for God who will save me. Though I sit in darkness, the Lord is my light.

17 ^{1 Co 2:1-9}

Wed Paul writes: We announce what no eye has seen and no ear has heard, what the human mind cannot visualize: all that God has prepared for those who love him.

18 ^{Lk 10:1-9}

Thu St LUKE Jesus said: The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. So pray that the Lord of the harvest may send out workers into his harvest.

19 ^{1 Co 10:12-13}

Fri God is faithful and will not allow you to be tempted beyond your strength. But when you are tempted, God will give you the means to stand up to it and will show you a way forward.

20 ^{Ps 36}

Sat In you, Lord, is the source of life; in your light we see light.

21 ^{Mk 10:35-45}

SUN Jesus said: The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life to set many free.

22 ^{Jr 12:1-3a}

Mon Jeremiah said: You know me, Lord, and you see me. You know that my heart is with you.

23 ^{Is 57:14-19}

Tue The Lord says: Peace! Peace to those who are near and those who are far away, and I will heal them.

24 ^{Ga 5:16-26}

Wed Since the Spirit is our life, let our actions be guided by the Spirit.

25 ^{Col 1:9-14}

Thu God has rescued us from the rule of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves. In him we enjoy our freedom, the forgiveness of sin.

26 ^{Rm 8:1-11}

Fri The One who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit living in you.

27 ^{1 Th 2:1-12}

Sat God has entrusted us with the Gospel, and so we preach, not trying to please people but God who knows our hearts.

28 ^{Mk 10:46-52}

SUN Jesus asked a blind man, "What do you want me to do for you?" "Rabbi, I want to see," he replied. And Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has saved you."

29 ^{2 Tm 1:6-11}

Mon St. Paul wrote to Timothy: Do not be ashamed to be a witness to our Lord who has saved us and given us a holy calling.

30 ^{Is 50:10}

Tue Who among you reveres the Lord? Who among you walks in darkness and sees no light? Trust in the name of the Lord and rely upon your God.

31 ^{Ga 6:7-10}

Wed Let us not become tired of doing good. The harvest will come in good time if we persevere.

Holy Spirit, you always keep coming to us. And wherever people pray in the world you are present; you are alongside every human being.

OCTOBER

DAILY READINGS

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

Mk 12:28-34

4Sun Jesus said: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength. Love your neighbour as yourself. These are the two greatest commandments.

Ex 13:17-22

5Mon In the desert, the Lord went ahead of his people, by day in a pillar of cloud to show them the way, and by night in a column of fire to give them light. Thus they could walk by day and by night.

Mt 6:5-8

6Tue Jesus said: Whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Mt 7:14-20

7Wed The flock you chose, Lord, is alone in the wilderness. Shepherd your people and lead them to pasture.

Mt 5:1-12

1Thu ALL SAINTS

Jesus said: How blessed are the poor in spirit: the kingdom of heaven is theirs. Blessed are those who mourn: they will be comforted.

Ws 2:1, 12-31

2Fri God created human beings for an everlasting life, he made them in the image of his own nature.

Mt 21:18-22

3Sat Jesus said: If you have faith, everything you ask for in prayer, you will receive.

Mk 12:41-44

11Sun Jesus saw a poor widow put two small coins into the temple treasury and, calling his disciples, he said, "In truth I tell you this poor widow has put in more than all the others, for they all gave out of their wealth, but she in her poverty has put in everything she possessed."

Rv 21:1-7

12Mon God will make his home among human beings; they will be his people and he will be their God.

1 P 1:22-25

13Tue Peter writes: Love one another deeply, from the heart.

Gn 12:1-5

14Wed The Lord said to Abraham, "Leave your country, your kinsfolk and your father's house for the land I will show you." And Abraham set out, as the Lord had told him.

Ps 147

15Thu Give praise to the Lord! It is good to sing praises to the one who heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

1 Tm 4:7-10

16Fri Paul writes: The point of all our toiling and battling is that we have put our trust in the living God, who is the saviour of all people.

Jr 31:15-20

17Sat The Lord says: My people are so dear to me that, whenever I speak of them, I remember them lovingly. Therefore my heart yearns for them and has compassion on them.

Is 65:17-18

10Sat The Lord says: See, I am going to create new heavens and a new earth. Be filled with rejoicing for ever, for I am creating my people to be gladness.

Mk 13:24-32

18Sun Jesus said: Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

Dn 2:19-23

19Mon Daniel said: May God be blessed for ever and ever. The Lord reveals depths and mysteries, and light dwells with him.

Is 53:6-12

20Tue We had all gone astray like sheep, everyone taking their own way, and the Lord has laid on his servant the faults of all of us. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth.

Jn 14:1-12

21Wed Jesus said: The words I say to you are not just my own, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.

Ps 89:1-30

22Thu I shall sing of the love of the Lord for ever; my words shall proclaim your faithfulness to all generations. For your love stands firm for ever, you have established your faithfulness in heaven itself.

Ws 6:12-16

23Fri The wisdom of God is readily seen by those who love her. Those who seek her will find.

Ac 4:1-22

24Sat When they were forbidden to speak in the name of Jesus, Peter and John replied, "We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."

Jn 18:33-37

25Sun Jesus said to Pilate: For this I was born, and for this I came into the world: to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.

Is 55:6-11

26Mon Seek the Lord while he is near. Turn to our God, who pardons freely.

Ac 4:1-22

27Tue Christ, the stone the builders rejected, has become the cornerstone.

Hos 2:16-22

28Wed The Lord makes of his people his wife and says of her: I will draw her to myself. I will lead her into the desert and speak to her heart.

Ws 1:1-15

29Thu The Spirit of the Lord fills the world: it holds all things together and knows every word said.

Mt 4:18-22

30Fri ST ANDREW
Jesus saw Simon and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people." And at once they left their nets and followed him.

In trying to follow you, Christ Jesus, we realize that you call us to forgive, again and again. And being faithful to your Gospel can kindle in us this passion for forgiveness.

NOVEMBER

DAILY READINGS

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

God of compassion, what you want for us is life to the full. Enable us to listen to your Word and to put it into practice. It is light that transfigures our humanity.

2 ^{Lk 21:25-36} **SUN** ADVENT Jesus said: Be on the watch and pray at all times.

3 ^{Col 1:15-20} **Mon** Christ is the image of the unseen God; in him all things have been created, in heaven and upon the earth, both the visible and the invisible.

4 ^{Is 40:1-5} **Tue** Make straight in the desert a highway for our God. The uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together.

5 ^{Is 51:4-8} **Wed** The Lord says: My justice will become a light to the nations. My salvation is on the way and all peoples will put their hope in me.

6 ^{Mt 1:18-23} **Thu** The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Emmanuel, a name which means "God-with-us".

7 ^{Jr 15:15-21} **Fri** Jeremiah said: When your words came, Lord, I devoured them: your word was my delight and the joy of my heart.

8 ^{Lk 1:26-38} **Sat** Mary said to the angel: I am the Lord's servant, let it happen to me as you have said.

9 ^{Lk 3:1-6} **SUN** John the Baptist came as is written in the book of Isaiah: A voice of one who cries in the desert, "Prepare a way for the Lord, make straight his paths!"

10 ^{Jm 5:7-11} **Mon** James writes: Be patient; do not lose heart, for the Lord's coming will be soon.

11 ^{Lk 12:32-48} **Tue** Jesus said: Be like people waiting for their master to return, ready to open the door as soon as he comes and knocks.

12 ^{Is 28:16-17} **Wed** The Lord says: See, I am laying a foundation stone for my people. And I will take justice for a measure and righteousness as a level.

13 ^{Lk 1:5-25} **Thu** The angel said to Zechariah, father of John the Baptist: Your wife will bear you a son who will be great in the sight of the Lord. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit and will bring back many people to the Lord their God.

14 ^{2 P 3:8-9, 13-14} **Fri** Peter writes: God is not slow in carrying out his promises, as some people think. Rather, God is being patient with you, wanting no one to be lost and for all to be brought to repentance.

15 ^{Pr 4:18-27} **Sat** The path of the upright is like the light of dawn, whose brightness increases to the full light of day.

16 ^{Lk 3:15-22} **SUN** John the Baptist said: I baptise you with water, but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandals. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

17 ^{2 Co 8:7-15} **Mon** Our Lord Jesus Christ became poor for your sake, so that through his poverty you might become rich.

18 ^{Mt 19:16-22} **Tue** Jesus said to a rich young man: If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.

19 ^{Jn 14:19-23} **Wed** Jesus said: Anyone who loves me will keep my word, and the Father will love them, and we shall come to them and make our home in them.

20 ^{Ep 2:14-18} **Thu** Christ came to announce the joyful message of peace: peace to those who are far away, peace to those who are near. Through him, in one Spirit, we all have free access to the Father.

21 ^{Hab 3:18-19} **Fri** I shall rejoice in the Lord, I shall exult in God my saviour.

22 ^{Dn 3:51-90 (B:64-65)} **Sat** Bless the Lord, you who are holy and humble in heart, praise and glorify him forever! For God has rescued us from the hand of death.

23 ^{Lk 1:39-45} **SUN** Elizabeth said to Mary: Blessed is she who believed that the promise the Lord made her would be fulfilled.

24 ^{Is 9:1-6} **Mon** The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has shined. For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given. And this will be his name: Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

25 ^{Lk 2:1-20} **Tue** CHRISTMAS The angel of the Lord said to the shepherds: Do not be afraid. I bring you news of a great joy, a joy to be shared by all the people: today a Saviour has been born to you, he is Christ the Lord.

26 ^{Lk 1:67-79} **Wed** ST STEPHEN The dawn from on high has come to visit us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

27 ^{1 Jn 1:1-4} **Thu** ST JOHN Life itself became visible, we saw it and testify to it. We proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was revealed to us.

28 ^{Jn 1:11-18} **Fri** The Word was in the world and, though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. But to all who accepted him he gave the power to become children of God.

29 ^{Is 52:7-10} **Sat** The Lord has revealed his holy arm before all peoples. All the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.

30 ^{Lk 2:41-52} **SUN** When Mary and Joseph found the child Jesus in the Temple, he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" And his mother treasured all these things in her heart.

31 ^{Mt 11:28-30} **Mon** Jesus said: Come to me, you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest.

DECEMBER

DAILY READINGS

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

situation of no return; he has to deal with utter need and his lack of power. His only resource is to entrust himself to God. And again God reveals himself as a God of life in the midst of death. The God who manifests himself at Zarephath is a God who comes close to the poor and who gives life. The mission that God gives to Elijah there has nothing to do with the one Elijah gave himself. He has been turned round by God: what will he do?

We can suppose that Elijah comes back purified after his long "training period" at Zarephath. Now the prophet receives a clear order and a clear promise to meet the king and announce the end of the drought (1 Kings 18:1-2). The situation in the country is critical; Elijah is seen as an agent of death (v. 6). But he seems not to react to the words of disaster; he shows a sort of indifference, inflexibility. He is back to the logic of power and confrontation (vv. 16-20).

Elijah knows that victory is at hand. He has the winning cards and he is about to play them for his own benefit. Of course he wishes to be faithful to God...but to which one? Elijah lets himself be seduced by the logic of power. God and Baal are competitors; they play in the same league, but God is stronger! Where is our freedom, and God's? There is no room here for a relationship.

Elijah appears ironic; he thinks he is master of the situation (v. 21-38). The end is tragic because he carries this destructive logic to the extreme (v. 39-40). Why does God seem to be so different from the one who revealed himself in Kerith and Zarephath? The hand of the Lord is not there to assure him, but rather to push him into a mortal danger, a new adventure and a new openness. God wants to show Elijah where his logic will lead him. The logic of violence is like a boomerang, it turns back against him. He has to flee into the desert to save his skin! (1 Kings 19:1-5). After a glorious victory and after a demonstration of power, a little threat makes him fall apart.... His life has no more meaning; everything seems hopeless. Perhaps Elijah begins to understand that something is wrong...with him! For the first time he sees that he is part of the problem.

Elijah is called, in this most critical time of his life, to an Exodus, to return to the sources. To find the faith (stability) he must leave everything behind and walk for forty days to God's mountain (v. 9-14), where God will manifest himself without mediators. At Horeb Elijah is alone, destitute, fragile and in deep depression. And God reveals to Elijah, in a whisper of silence, the very opposite of what he had thought and preached.

REFLECTING ON THE WORD

Must a Christian always avoid violence?

In the third century the Christian thinker Origen wrote: "Having become through Jesus children of peace, we learn the art of war no more." There can be no clearer answer: a Christian must avoid violence. The entire Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapters 5 to 7) asserts this. Its core is the Beatitudes: "Blessed are the poor in heart; blessed are those persecuted for what is right... the kingdom of heaven is theirs." In the steps of Jesus, we can even be led to discover a kind of efficacy in non-violence: "if someone wants to take your tunic, hand him your cloak!" (Matthew 5:40). In this way we become "children of our Father in heaven, for he makes his sun rise on the evil and the good" (Matthew 5:45). Better to suffer violence than be deprived of our condition as children of the Father. Christians have too much to lose by becoming violent.

No self-defense, then? Pope John Paul II, in his message for peace on January 1, 1982, proclaimed that "peoples have the right and even the duty to protect, by appropriate means, their existence and freedom against an unjust aggressor." By these words he continued a reflection on legitimate force initiated by St. Augustine in the fourth century (see *City of God*, XIX, 7).

What, then, is a use of force which is not violence? This question must be asked by institutions that guarantee peace, in order to ensure strict rules of engagement that allow a legitimate use of force as a lesser evil when there is really no other alternative. Light from the Gospel can inspire guarantors of order and justice so as to respect human dignity, in particular the rule of "proportional means" in the face of aggression. The law aims to fix the degrees of protection and reparation according to the scale of offenses and crimes.

On a personal level, finally, the asceticism necessary to purify our desires also involves some use of force. This is surely what Jesus meant when he spoke, somewhat provocatively, of those who have made themselves "eunuchs for the Kingdom" (Matthew 19:12). Containing the violence present within us does not happen without a struggle. This is the struggle to "dominate" the "wild beast crouching at our door" that God described to Cain (Genesis 4). God himself said, "If you act well, you can dominate it!" Certainly not by violence, but rather by the power of prayer: "In quiet is your salvation, in trust is your strength" (Isaiah 30:15). It is this quiet strength that St. Paul calls "putting on the breastplate of faith and love, with as your helmet the hope of salvation" (1 Thessalonians 5:8-9). It is up to us, with these weapons alone, to keep on waging the fight for peace.

always with former street children "assistants". I can see how not only youths, but also volunteers receive much in return for their service. They go back changed: more experienced, knowing what they want from life, and able to understand problems they didn't encounter before.

On a still deeper level, it is an attitude of openness to all.

Armen (Armenia)

In the society of the 1970s under the Soviet regime, people with disabilities and their families were isolated and excluded. In most cases the parents were alone and helpless in the face of this suffering. It was hard to find someone who could be with them and share their difficulties. Today the situation has changed, although there is still much to do to integrate people with disabilities and their families in society. I work as a volunteer with some of them. I see that the commitment of volunteers comes from deep within their heart. I received this as a great gift—being able to work with disabled children and take care of them.

Any commitment requires a sacrifice of time, energy, health, for the people who need assistance. But this sacrifice is rewarded by the unusual feeling of being useful to someone else who really needs my help. Quite often, the gratefulness of a child with a disability is visible in his smile: I receive this as a great gift. The feeling of being able to brighten the day of one of these children is one of the greatest joys possible—realizing that my abilities, generously given by God, were able to help someone whose abilities are in some sense reduced.

In the face of poverty and injustice, some end up by revolting or are even tempted by aimless violence. Violence cannot be a way to change society.

Elisa (Dominican Republic)

Given what I consider injustices in my society I cannot help but feel anger, pain, a kind of powerlessness in thinking that I can do nothing, and yet at the same time I feel a courage, a courage that compels me to act and not to stand still, not to keep quiet, and not to remain alone passively observing situations around me.

Violence has never been part of that impulse of my heart; my heart's response has always been to act through love. It's easy to get carried away by the first impulse of violence or to follow the easy route and to turn a blind eye to countless injustices, but God always calls us to

love. I always answer through love and even when I do not have the strength or desire to keep going, the best gift God has given me arises—my joy. My smile is always there for those who need it, because that joy comes from God, and from this I draw the strength to begin once again to act through love.

But we need to listen to the young people who express their indignation in order to grasp the basic reasons for it.

Pito (Puerto Rico)

My experience has been strongly marked by the right to an accessible college education. The current administration has tried to limit the access to the public university through the creation of laws, obstructing the inclusiveness of education by making it more expensive. Given this outrage over the abuse of power, I have sought to bring through the youth ministry a message of truth, love, justice and freedom. These values of the God's Kingdom have been instrumental in the process of expressing our feelings of nonconformity. During my pastoral ministry I have actively participated in demonstrations seeking equal opportunities for those who aspire to a decent education. I have planned and organized, together with the pastoral youth, prayers and meetings calling for unity and solidarity in the academic community. For I believe that everyone has the duty and responsibility to take part in a non-violent struggle for a just and more inclusive society.

Young Spaniards involved in the movement of the *indignados* in Madrid wrote to me: "Anything can happen if the situation does not get better. Many people are unemployed; they are losing their homes and their basic human rights...." (note 6)

Marga (Spain)

These past weeks have been very interesting because of the events celebrating the anniversary of the May 15 movement. In Madrid, the *indignados* came together last year for gatherings, workshops, and working-groups. I attended a meeting about a project of cooperatives that seeks to find a new and simpler way of life, to produce only what we need and to live in a simple and healthy way, with organic produce. Groups of unemployed are trying to find a way to share among themselves and with their neighbors by seeking solutions to short- and long-term work in cooperative networks.

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